RADICALIZATION PATHWAYS IN THE ONLINE CONTEXT
Accounting for User Migration Across Extremist Spaces

Rina James, they/them/theirs
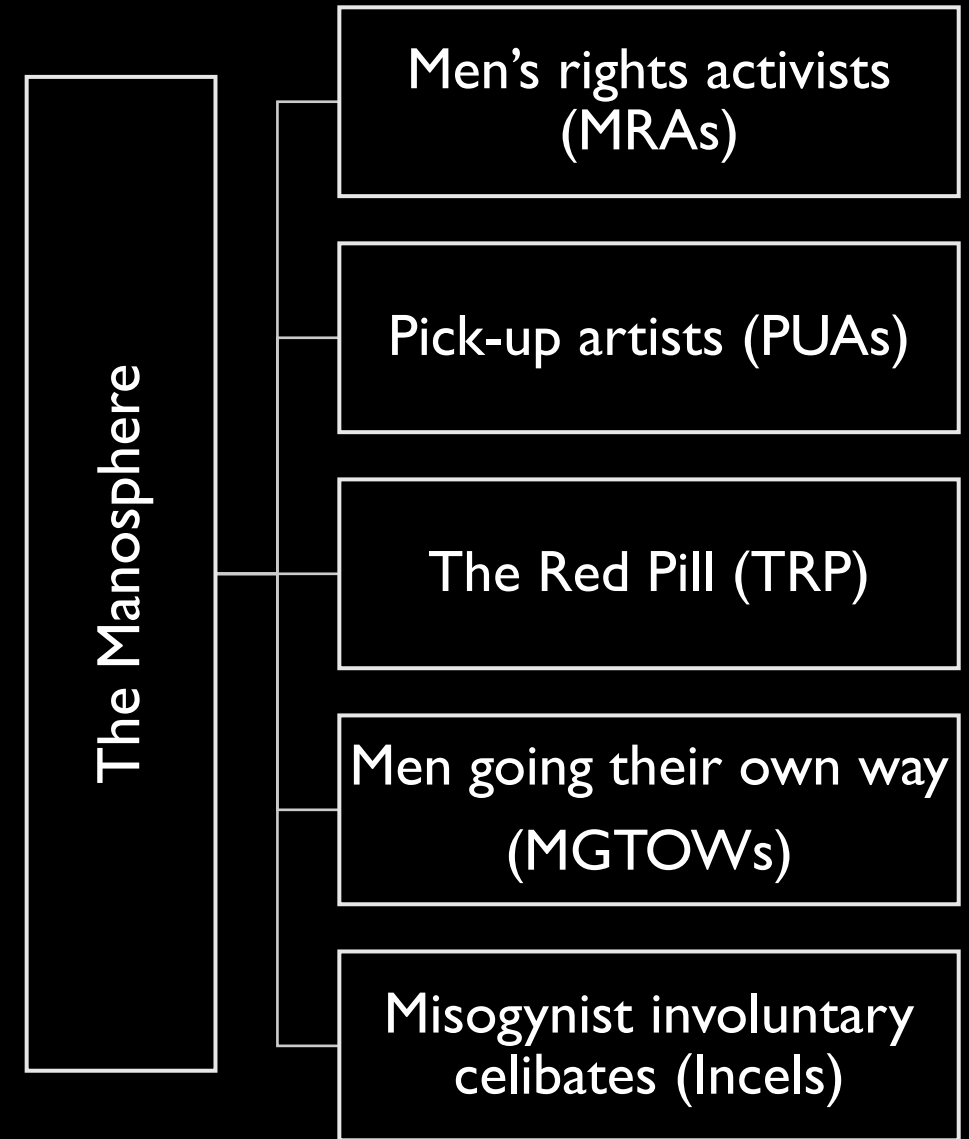PhD Candidate, University of Arizona, School of Sociology

Why study user migration?

› User trajectories across digital spaces—sometimes referred to as 'pipelines' or 'pathways'—have been identified as one component of the online radicalization process[1]

› Frequently involves migration between platforms or distinct communities, and towards more extreme spaces[1]

› The relationship between migration and radicalization may be multidirectional[2]

› Yet, mechanisms that drive some users to migrate, or that determine radicalization in-place versus through migration, are undertheorized

[1] Kor-Sins 2021; Mamié et al. 2021; Newell et al. 2016; Munn 2019; Ribeiro et al. 2020
[2] Kor-Sins 2021; Mamié et al. 2021; Ribeiro et al. 2021

Male supremacists

› Most visible in five primary groups housed within 'the Manosphere'[1]

› Defined by intense misogyny, virulent antifeminism, and conspiratorial thinking[3]

› Includes online iterations of existing movements, and new groups that evolved from these communities[4]

› Previous work has identified trends in shifting participation and user migration towards more extreme manosphere communities[4]

The Manosphere

Men's rights activists (MRAs)

Pick-up artists (PUAs)

The Red Pill (TRP)

Men going their own way (MGTOWs)

Misogynist involuntary celibates (Incels)

[3] Rothermel et al. 2022
[4] Mamié et al. 2021; Ribeiro et al. 2021

Research question

RQ.

What individual and community-level factors predict user migration to more extreme male supremacist communities?

Data

› Pushshift Reddit dataset; contains more than 6.2 billion posts from over 2.8 million subreddits

› Analysis utilizes a subset of the data from 56 male supremacist subreddits

› Covers March 2008 and December 2022

› Includes a total of 31 million+ posts from 1,100,554 unique user profiles

Analysis

Analysis focuses on:

(1) Summarizing user participation patterns

(2) Identifying trends in participation and migration over time

(3) Determining differences between migrating and non-migrating users

(4) Identifying key factors driving user migration

Migration is conceptualized as a shift in where a user's **primary participation** is occurring

Finding #1: Limited engagement

Most user's participation in manosphere communities was limited and brief

› The mean duration of user participation was **1.4** years

› **75%** of users were active for a year or less; **91%** were active for two years or less

TABLE 1.
YEARS ACTIVE IN MANOSPHERE COMMUNITIES

Years Active	Frequency	Percent	Cum. Percent
1	831,485	75.55	75.55
2	167,556	15.22	90.77
3	54,836	4.98	95.75
4	23,259	2.11	97.86
5	11,116	1.01	98.87
6	5,570	0.51	99.38
7	3,086	0.28	99.66
8	1,698	0.15	99.81
9	944	0.09	99.90
10+	1,004	0.10	100.00
N = 1,100,554			

Finding #2: Focused participation

Manosphere participants are, overall, relatively focused in terms of community engagement

› Across all years of data, **87%** of users participated in only one community, and **65% to 98%** of users participated in only one community in any given year

› Among users active in multiple communities, the bulk of their participation—**74%** on average—still occurred in their primary community

› Of the 269,059 potential migrants—those active for more than one year—**27%** migrated between primary communities at some point

Finding #3: Trends changes over time
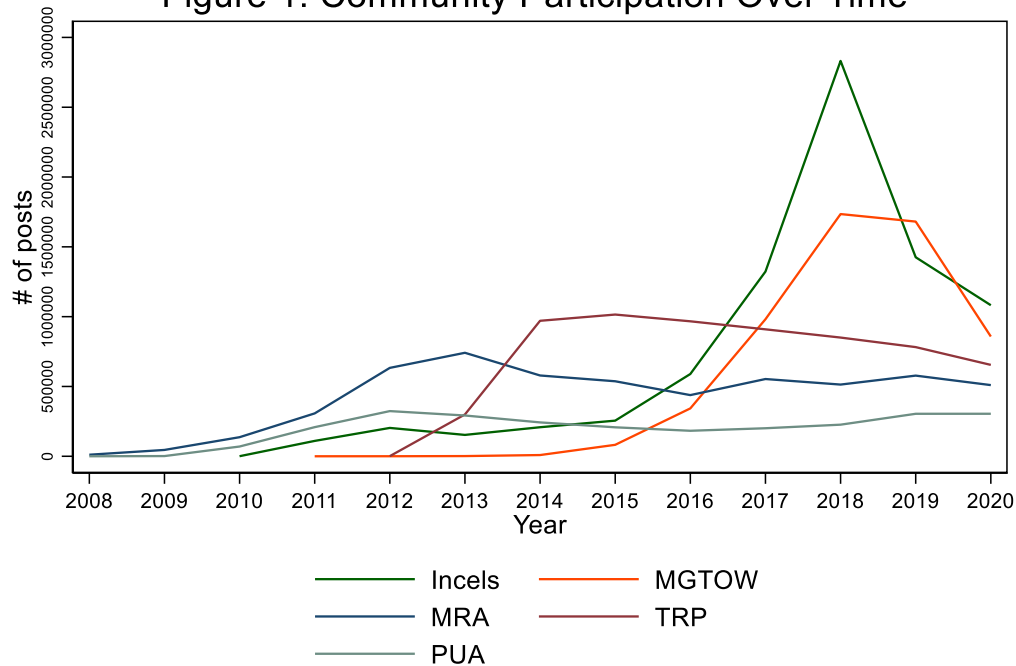

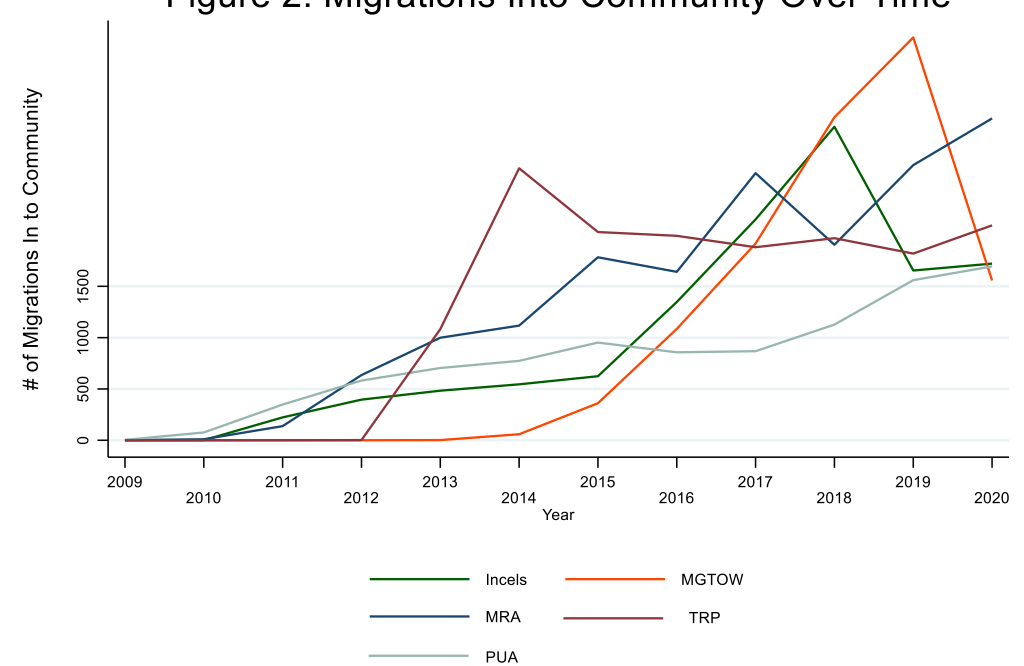Figure 1. Community Participation Over Time

Figure 2. Migrations Into Community Over Time

Finding #4: Migrating users are distinct

Migrating users participated more and were more positively received overall...

...but also received more formal sanctioning

Table 2. Mean Comparisons for Migrating and Non-Migrating Users		
	Migrating users	**Non-migrating users**
# of posts	156.74	20.92
Post score (avg)	928.11	159.58
Number of comments received (avg)	127.74	17.31
Posts gilded (%)	0.052	0.007
Posts removed (%)	0.052	0.007
Posts marked controversial (%)	0.051	0.007

Finding #5: Toxicity and repression matter

Users who were more toxic, and who had toxicity levels more aligned with their primary community, were more likely to migrate to more extreme spaces.

Community-level bans or quarantines also increased the odds of migration to more extreme spaces.

Table 3. Odds Ratios for Factors Predicting Migration to More Extreme Communities

	Odds Ratio	% Increase in Odds of Migration
Average toxicity	1.05	5%
Toxicity alignment	1.06	6%
Community quarantines	1.63	63%
Community bans	1.47	47%

Implications

1. **Concerns over increasing engagement may be less warranted than originally believed**

   Research has pointed to increasing activity in male supremacist spaces as cause for concern; findings regarding limited engagement suggest few users are truly radicalized within these spaces.

2. **Platform-level interventions may be less effective than hoped**

   Reddit's most common responses to ideological extremism—bans and quarantines—increased the odds of migration to more extreme communities. This aligns with previous literature indicating that repression drives extremism and suggests platforms should consider alternative interventions.

THANK YOU!

CONTACT:
rinajames@arizona.edu